

# *Exploring the Development of the Education Aid from China to Africa in the Context of Foreign Aid Theory*

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**Keywords:** Education Aid, Foreign Aid, Education Policy

**Abstract:** Within the theoretical framework of foreign aid, this paper focuses on the development of China's education aid policy to Africa and draws inferences on the future strategic direction of China's education aid to Africa. The paper first identifies the significance and necessity of China's education aid to Africa. It then describes the theoretical framework of foreign assistance and defines the types of China's education aid policy to Africa. The analytical part of the article uses historical development as a timeline to analyse the development of China's education aid to Africa in different periods and several key turning points. The paper concludes with an in-depth analysis of the opportunities and challenges facing China's education aid to Africa and makes targeted and practical recommendations.

## 1. Background

In 2015, UNESCO released the Education 2030 Framework for Action, which recommends that every country in the world should make every effort to create an equitable educational environment and ensure that all citizens have equal access to education. Of interest is the framework's call for countries in a position to do so to engage in global education assistance actively, which is crucial for countries with disadvantaged educational development, such as the least developed countries, developing countries and African countries. (Zhou, H. Y., Li, X. U., & Education, S. O, 2017)

It cannot be denied that Africa today is still the region in need of sustained world assistance. Numerous data and literature confirm the need and urgency for aid to Africa. For example, the World Bank has ranked several African countries as the poorest in the world. In terms of data, Africa's poverty rate fell from 57 per cent in 1990 to 43 per cent in 2012, probably due to the benefit of world aid. However, the number of African citizens living in poverty has exploded yearly, increasing from about 300 million in 1990 to nearly 400 million in 2012. A large number of preventable, poverty-related deaths continued to occur daily in some African countries as late as 2016. (Kathleen et al., 2016). In parts of Africa, where a large proportion of the population still lives below the international poverty line of \$1.90 day, the development of local education undoubtedly faces a more significant dilemma than solving the problem of food and clothing. Thus, as called for by UNESCO, international aid or aid to Africa will play a crucial role in contributing to the development of African countries.

As China's foreign aid policy deepened, the government released the Measures for the Administration of Foreign Aid (*Trial*) and the Measures for Foreign Aid in 2014 and 2021, respectively. It established China's emerging status as an emerging aid donor and set out the structure of the departmental composition and methods of supervision of China's foreign aid. It establishes that the Ministry of Commerce is responsible for the majority of foreign aid. The China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA) is responsible for formulating foreign aid policy. At the same time, the Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China (MOFCOM) is responsible for the practical implementation of these aid policies. In addition, in its foreign aid, the Chinese government may request some departments to carry out additional or complementary work as needed, for example, by referring to the education department's studies and recommendations on China's foreign education aid policy when necessary. (The Measures on Foreign Aid Management,2022)[1-2].

The Chinese government believes that there is evidence that limited educational development may further constrain economic and socio-cultural development in Africa, exacerbating repeated fluctuations in poverty or stagnation or even regression of development in Africa. It is, therefore, necessary for China's education assistance to Africa to gradually develop into a vital component of China's foreign aid. The Chinese government defines foreign education aid as "human resources development cooperation", specifically referring to the provision of various forms of academic degree education, training, personnel exchange, and senior expert services to recipient countries(China's Foreign Aid, 2022)[3].

## 2. Definitions and Framework

Lancaster defines foreign aid activities as the spontaneous flow of public resources between different countries, usually between governments or Non-governments, of which at least 25% must be non-reimbursable to develop the economy and livelihoods of the recipient area. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) supports this view. It makes it clear that the purpose of foreign aid activities must be to help alleviate poverty and promote the development of the economy and livelihoods of the recipient country. (Lancaster,2007) Combined with the definition of foreign aid, China's education assistance to Africa is in line with the traditional definition of international foreign aid, which is to provide education-related or education development-related resources to African countries or regions in need of assistance out of the country's initiative and spontaneous , providing more than 25% of public resources free of charge, with the aim of improving the living standards of the people and promoting economic development in the recipient countries[4].

The types of aid can be classified in various ways according to different classifications. This article mainly refers to bilateral and multilateral aid definitions, distinguished by the number of countries participating in the aid[5]. According to the literature, bilateral aid refers to the direct provision of financial, technical, labour, and other support by the donor country to the recipient country without the involvement of other parties[6]. The aid contract is usually signed between the donor and recipient countries. The recipient country provides specific financial, technical, and service support to the recipient country as stipulated in the contract. The advantages of bilateral aid include the speed and simplicity of the process. However, there are also obvious disadvantages, such as the fact that the management of the aid process is rarely monitored, and the donor country can achieve its aid objectives by directly controlling the quantity and direction of aid. Multilateral aid is how aid donors rely on third parties to deliver aid. Multilateral aid usually has an international organisation that gathers aid resources from multiple aid donors and then allocates a certain amount of aid resources from this organisation to the countries that will receive aid. An international aid

organisation is usually an international organisation with an aid function and a certain degree of international influence. In multilateral aid, the way aid resources are managed and allocated by international organisations can effectively circumvent the conditions imposed by the aid donors on the recipient countries that are not in the interests of the recipient countries. (Heyneman, S. P., & Lee, B.,2013)[6].

With reference to the above definition, Chinese aid to Africa is mainly bilateral aid. Most of the aid is provided in direct agreements with recipient countries or regions. For example, the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), signed with African countries in 2000, was a unique strategy for China's assistance to Africa, with direct exchanges, cooperation, and agreements with African countries.

### **3. Analysis of the Development of Educational aid Policies in Africa Throughout History**

There is a general argument in favour of China's development assistance to Africa dating to the 1950s (Weizhen, Z.2020) to seek a political unity of consciousness between China and Africa, using direct economic assistance as a means. The aid projects covered water and hydropower infrastructure, transport infrastructure, and agricultural technology equipment. The Chinese government's assistance to Africa during this period increased China's influence among African countries and gained votes of support from African countries for China's bid for a seat in the United Nations.

In the 1980s, China reoriented its policy on aid to Africa. From one-way economic assistance to a model of "recipient and donor countries for mutual benefit". In aid to Africa, enterprises were included in the aid activities, and agreements were signed with African recipient countries. In addition to this, China also intensified its humanitarian assistance during this period in response to historical events. For example, in 1984, when a natural disaster struck the African region, China provided large amounts of money and materials free of charge to help African countries rebuild. The Chinese government's aid policy for Africa before the 1980s did not include aid for education as a mainstream area of assistance. Education, including primary education, higher education, vocational training, language training, skills training, and Confucius Institutes, did not receive the same level of attention as economic or infrastructural aid.

In the 21st century, China once again adjusted its aid policy towards Africa in line with its national conditions and changing international status, transforming its relations with Africa into a comprehensive strategic partnership. In this context, to further promote the development and reform of its aid policy to Africa, China has gradually shifted its focus from the traditional basis of aid for infrastructure and the economy to an emphasis on the field of education aid. Greater emphasis has been placed on the long-term and far-reaching positive impact of aid on Africa.

A large amount of typical data confirms the process of policy development. The literature points out that in the 1950s, there were only three Chinese aid teachers in Africa; by the 1990s, China had sent more than 300 aid teachers to Africa. The number of students from African countries attracted to China through the education aid policy rose from 24 in the 1950s to more than 5,000 in the 1990s; moreover, the variety of students' original areas also increased, from a few countries such as Egypt, Kenya and Cameroon in the 1950s to 42 African countries with which China has diplomatic relations in the 1990s. In the 21st century, the Ministry of Education's Action Plan for the Revitalisation of Education 2003 - 2007, published in 2004, promoted the establishment of Confucius Institutes outside China, encouraging and assisting recipient countries in setting up Chinese language teaching programmes. By 2021, more than 500 Confucius Institutes have been established in 162 countries and regions worldwide. ( Dexin, H &Yunhong, T., 2021) In 2009, Forum on China-Africa Cooperation Sharm El Sheikh Action Plan(2010-2012) agreed at the Forum

on China-Africa Cooperation stated that the Chinese government would build 50 primary and secondary schools in African countries within three years, increase the training of teachers in vocational institutions in African countries, strengthen interuniversity cooperation between Chinese and African universities, and encourage middle- and senior-administrators in Africa to work together. The Chinese government will provide assistance to 50 primary and secondary schools in African countries within three years, increase the training of teachers in vocational colleges in African countries, strengthen interuniversity cooperation between Chinese and African universities, encourage middle and senior African administrators to study for a master's degree in public administration in China, accept African post-docs to conduct scientific research in China and provide donations of scientific research equipment to African countries. (Embassy of the Peoples' Republic of China in the Republic of Botswana,2022) China's foreign education assistance has been extended from primary education to vocational education and then to higher education, forming a vertical pattern of education assistance.

#### 4. Opportunities and Challenges

Li's paper has made a strong case for the need for the Chinese government to sustain and strengthen its support for new aid-for-trade and investment policies based on long-term value returns beyond 2025, which should aim to benefit human investment in recipient countries so that the essential prerequisite is a strong development of new aid-for-education policies. (Li,2021) The "Education to Promote the Construction of *Belt and Road Initiative*" issued by the Ministry of Education in July 2016 has planned the comprehensive implementation of the "Silk Road" education assistance program, which catalyses China's foreign aid. The development of this action plan marks a new stage in the renewal of China's foreign education assistance policy, with the core of the strategy being the provision of educational assistance to recipient countries along the route through education cooperation projects. It also proves that one of the essential features of China's foreign education assistance in the new era is to help aid with cooperation. As the number of partner countries along the route grows, China's foreign education assistance system expands. At the same time, to better serve the implementation of the "Belt and Road" policy, in March 2018, the Chinese government established the National Department of International Development Cooperation. Their tasks include defining the strategic direction of the country's overall foreign aid and formulating implementation policies. A particularly noteworthy aspect of the agency's mandate is its monitoring and evaluation function of foreign aid projects. The establishment of the Department of National International Development Cooperation has increased the degree of standardisation of China's foreign aid work and facilitated the efficient delivery of foreign education assistance. (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2016), The Chinese government hopes that the establishment of the new agency will play a new role in making China's education assistance policies and actions toward Africa more coherent and efficient. It will also help the Chinese government explore and confirm the feasibility of a model for investing in human resources, cultivating human resources in recipient countries, and reaping long-term returns based on investment in people in future aid to Africa.

The controversies and challenges that China's aid policy towards Africa has faced remain. The controversy stems from the large body of literature and international commentary that has evaluated and questioned China's aid policy towards Africa differently. (Sun, 2021). The controversy revolves around the so-called 'bilateral aid policy' model of Chinese aid to Africa. The literature argues that China's model of direct engagement and aid agreements with recipient countries is, in fact, neither a departure from an official development assistance (ODA) framework nor the application of an established aid system. (Zheng,2021) Therefore, whether the Chinese government actively

promotes its aid policy towards Africa as 'evil' or 'kind' will fail to quell the debate worldwide because of a lack of objectivity.

On the other hand, the challenge comes from China and the recipient countries. Internal corruption and misuse of funds in the international aid system cannot be wholly eradicated or solved. As mentioned in the controversy, China's foreign aid does not involve a third party consisting of international institutions or rights. Therefore, there is a relative lack of external oversight of China and its recipient countries in all aspects of aid policy formulation and implementation, in terms of the application of funds, the degree of transparency in project creation, and tender, and the monitoring and evaluation of corruption.

## 5. Recommendations

This paper offers suggestions to address the above controversies and challenges. The Chinese government could continue to set up a special regulatory subdepartment under the National Department of International Development Cooperation and a management subdepartment. The management department could be responsible for designing and implementing more progressive policies and regulations to aid project management. For example, a separate management model for project management and fund management may work. A monitoring and auditing body could be established in the recipient country. This body should comprehensively evaluate the design and implementation of China's education aid programmes in Africa. Establish unique Chinese criteria for quantifying aid effectiveness and monitor the entire aid process to determine the extent to which China's education aid initiatives in Africa are achieving the desired results.

This paper confirms through data and analysis that China's education aid policy in Africa has been effective in improving the continent's development woes. At the same time, by analysing the continuous development and reform of China's education aid policy in Africa over its history, the paper also draws the inference that the future direction of China's aid strategy in Africa is to promote aid through cooperation projects, with a return cycle based on human resource development as the aid cycle. The core approach is to develop sustainable human resources in the recipient countries in the long term through several integrated education aid projects.

The paper argues that for a short period in the future, China's education aid to Africa will continue to break away from the international aid framework, adhere to a comprehensive bilateral aid framework, and gradually develop and refine a unique Chinese aid system and evaluation criteria. Finally, the brief offers suggestions to help reduce the international controversy over China's education aid to Africa and the internal risks faced by both China and recipient countries. It also means that the future Chinese government has much work to improve China's aid system to Africa.

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